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Teachers as Intellectuals and Advocates: Professional Development for Bilingual Education Teachers

Bilingual education continues to be one of the most controversial educational programs worldwide. In several US states, it has even been put to a vote in general elections. Internationally, nations that have long promoted multilingualism are debating whether the languages of new, working-class immigrants deserve to be taught in schools. Consequently, bilingual educators now find themselves in a newly charged and precarious political position. We argue that bilingual educators are now beholden to a single professional development goal: reappraising their efforts at

saving this important instructional program in the interest of immigrant youth. We first explore the demise of bilingual education across the United States, address the condition of bilingual education worldwide, point to promising teacher development projects, and end by asking bilingual educators to consider who is left to join them in promoting the marginalized languages—and communities who speak them—in the context of a new world order.

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LEGITIMATE PROFESSIONS ARE typically marked by extensive preprofessional training, a state-sponsored credential or license, and, perhaps most important, enduring efforts to advance professional knowledge. Because we strongly believe that teaching is a legitimate

profession and should remain so, our article addresses the topic of the professional development (PD) of teachers, specifically teachers who work in bilingual education. Although we focus primarily on the work of bilingual teachers in the United States, we also include an international perspective. Our analysis is substantially informed by the view that bilingual education teachers must possess a critical perspective because they are often working against dominant political and social forces that seek to disempower, or at least not help to empower, marginalized communities.

Our purpose in this article is not an exhaustive review of the literature (impossible given the limited space), but rather an overview of selected works that serve to point out the advocacy role that bilingual teachers must play to promote the instruction they value. We limit our discussion to PD for practicing teachers, although we understand that preservice preparation provides an important foundation for future professional growth and learning. We point readers interested in more of an overview of preservice bilingual teacher education to an excellent volume (Flores, Sheets, & Clark, 2010). Nor do we provide here a comprehensive review of the work in PD for general service teachers, although we build on a few key articles.

When outlining the current state of the professional development of bilingual teachers and articulating our vision, there are a number of definitions one must initially grapple with. The most immediate is what we mean by bilingual education. At the basic level, it means the use of two or more languages in educating students (Baker, 2011). In the United States, this has meant a range of frameworks that include *weak* forms, such as transitional programs that focus on the transition to the dominant national language, to *strong* forms, such as maintenance and enrichment programs—promoting two or more languages. In some countries the rationale for bilingual education includes the maintenance of the mother tongue; in others it has been mainly to promote the dominant language (English in many cases) as the medium of instruction. Although attitudes, frameworks, and approaches at these

different levels vary across the world (Garcia, 2009), most countries have struggled historically with their language policies, and bilingual education in these countries has been heavily contested. Consequently, the nature of bilingual teaching has always been controversial and, at the same time, instrumental in limiting or opening spaces for bilingual education. Therefore, we argue that the key PD for and from bilingual teachers today is the building of capacity to promote policies and practices to empower language minorities and help bilingual education survive in a hostile political climate.

Based on the evidence and the theme of our work, we turn to a review of the recent history of bilingual education in California, a provocative tale of the influence of politics and money that conveniently captures the overarching troubles facing bilingual teachers. In the mid-1990s, Ron Unz, a wealthy California business executive, began an expensive and self-financed political campaign to eliminate bilingual education, thus initiating the first pedagogical program/practice ever to be placed on a ballot. Using disingenuous data and other distortions (see Téllez, Flinspach, & Waxman, 2005, for a review), he succeeded, at a minimum, in making bilingual education much harder to practice in California and several other states (Ovando, 2003).

To our minds, no other evidence is needed to demonstrate the political explosiveness of bilingual education and why PD for bilingual teachers must be considered separately from all other teacher PD. After all, various constituencies have disagreed over educational programs that reached a much wider audience without ever making their way to a ballot. The so-called Reading Wars come to mind (see Pearson, 2004, for a review), in which the battle over phonics versus whole language methods has raged on for decades, but the issue has never been put to a general election.

And if the effects of statewide ballot initiatives were not enough, bilingual teachers have had to respond to national political attacks on their work that have resulted in less funding. Prieto (2009) and Cahnmann and Varghese (2006) documented the US federal government's retreat from bilingual education, which symbolically removed the

word *bilingual* from the agency charged with helping limited English proficient students gain proficiency in English. Formerly known the Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Language Affairs, established by Congress in 1974, a far more conservative Congress established the Office of English Language Acquisition (OELA) when No Child Left Behind was approved in 2001. And in a gesture far surpassing symbol, OELA immediately removed the vast majority of grants designed to enhance bilingual education and the development of teaching capacities for bilingual teachers. Prieto's research documents the reactions of 10 novice bilingual teachers in Texas to the lack of support for their programs (Texas still permits bilingual education) and even their own histories. The teachers in this study reported the impulse to use *pedagogies of the home* or cultural strategies as both teaching tools and important markers of professional identity, but found their instincts rejected by the larger school culture.

Even the largest teacher professional organizations, in the United States at least, have largely ignored the education of language learners and the PD of bilingual teachers, all the while advocating for multicultural learners and their teachers for decades (Télliez & Waxman, 2006). This is not meant to be a critique of the profession, but rather to point out the general neglect of language issues. For many who work in language education, Crystal City (Trujillo, 2005) is just as important as Little Rock, but it has taken their colleagues a very long time to recognize it.

Given the unique conditions facing bilingual teachers, we wondered how existing research on PD could inform our work. In reviewing the literature on PD for general teachers, we found several excellent articles that pull together what is known as *best practices* in teacher knowledge and growth. Each suggests that teachers' political engagement, or at least teacher agency or autonomy, must be included in teacher PD for genuine growth in pedagogical knowledge and skills. For example, Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1995) suggested that strong PD (a) engages teachers in concrete tasks of teaching, assessment, observation, and reflection that il-

luminates learning and development; (b) uses inquiry, reflection, and experimentation that are participant-driven; (c) is collaborative, involving a sharing of knowledge among educators and a focus on teachers' communities of practice rather than on individual teachers; (d) connects to and derives from teachers' work with their students; (e) is sustained, ongoing, intensive, and supported by modeling, coaching, and the collective solving of problems of practice; and (f) connects to other aspects of school change.

We find that the work on PD for bilingual teachers reflects these general principles but with specific emphasis on collective growth and knowledge, which is sometimes in opposition to nonbilingual teacher PD. For example, Calderón's (2002) study reports the results from a national survey of 100 bilingual teachers regarding their specific professional concerns. Among these, they noted that (a) mainstream teachers developed misconceptions about the bilingual program; (b) bilingual teachers are treated as second-class citizens; (c) the transition of students from bilingual to mainstream classrooms is too abrupt and detrimental; (d) there are few opportunities for bilingual and mainstream teachers to discuss, plan, and address the needs of individual students after their transition; (e) mainstream teachers always blame the bilingual teachers if a student does not do well after transition; and (f) each year there are "silent and not so silent battles" over resources between bilingual and mainstream teachers (pp. 131–132). The study also found that the PD specifically aimed at bilingual learners was not highly regarded by most bilingual teachers, who reported that the conferences they attended and the PD offered by the school district were often redundant and failed to provide a forum for their genuine professional concerns, similar to Varghese's (2006) study.

Calderon's (2002) work suggests that the general PD emphasis on collective action cannot be directly brought to bear on PD for bilingual teachers, who need two kinds of collective spaces: one for themselves and one with their nonbilingual counterparts. Similarly, Dalton and Moir (1996) shared the design of a project

providing professional development experiences for novice bilingual teachers and suggested that PD for bilingual teachers must be interactive, contextualized, and coconstructed.

The emphasis on collective PD might invite a comparison to recent nationwide efforts in the United States. In fact, we find that many of the contemporary PD efforts offered by for-profit companies such as Solution Tree provide an excellent counterexample to the type of professional development we envision. These programs claim to be based on teacher empowerment and research-based practices, when they are essentially a method to force teachers to examine data tied to state standards or a particular curriculum implementation in groups or teams. Talbert (2009) and others have been critical of this approach, and argued that it is not true to the core principles of collective learning. Corporate-style PD will only further disempower bilingual teachers, and yet this model appears to be the dominant mode of teacher learning in the United States at the moment.

But what of bilingual teachers across the globe? Do we find similarly ill-considered teacher PD? A cursory review of bilingual education worldwide finds some commonality with the US context, but the outlook appears to be more favorable for bilingual teachers, mostly because, unlike the United States, the majority of national ministries of education favor multilingualism. Therefore, other nations tend to offer more federal support both in terms of structure, as well as funding. For instance, in South Africa, there is a program known as Training of Trainers program for educators (ToTSA) in multilingual settings in southern Africa (Benson & Plüddemann, 2010). ToTSA is the only program known to date that has addressed the need for building professional capacity among African practitioners and policy-makers working in multilingual education. Guided by the principle that mother-tongue-based bilingual education is vital to national interests, ToTSA has done more than teach and train; “it has facilitated international networking and empowered participants to face the challenges inherent in their own contexts” (Benson & Plüddemann, 2010, p. 364).

In Bolivia, local educators at primary, secondary, and tertiary levels may, themselves, be opening spaces for multilingual education. One of the most interesting, promising, and potentially enduring developments in the Andes in the last few decades has been the Master’s program for indigenous students, known as the Program for Professional Development in Bilingual Intercultural Education for the Andean Countries (PROEIB Maestría), founded by PROEIB Andes. Housed at the University of San Simón in Cochabamba, Bolivia, the PROEIB Maestría is a consortium effort sponsored by indigenous organizations, universities, and ministries of education in six South American countries, with additional international funding from German Technical Assistance, UNICEF, UNESCO, the World Bank, and others. Impelled by the vision and energy of Peruvian sociolinguist Luis Enrique López, PROEIB Andes and especially its master’s program have opened up spaces for indigenous rights, with indigenous education surpassing even those initially envisioned in the Bolivian reform (Hornberger, 2010).

The European context provides an intermediate space between the examples provided previously and those in the United States (Garcia, 2009). The Council of Europe supports a pluralistic policy where there is support for majority and minority languages but not necessarily immigrant languages. The Council of Europe’s (1998) *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* emphasized the “richness and diversity of European cultural life through greater mutual knowledge of national and regional languages, including those less widely used” (p. 2). This document acknowledges that a “sustained, lifelong effort” must be encouraged to meet the needs of a “multilingual and multicultural Europe” (p. 2). The document contains a section on Teacher Training that mandates that the ministries take “steps to ensure that adequate numbers of suitably trained language teachers are available at all levels so that where appropriate a wide range of languages may be taught” (Council of Europe, 1998, p. 6).

In general, the European model of bilingual education remains wedded to the teaching of

dominant languages (e.g., French students learning English or German) but few have developed bilingual programs in Turkish or Maghrebi Arabic (Hélot, 2003). Such programs may be considered an attack on the historic prestige of the dominant European languages, which, at least in the case of France (e.g., *L'Académie française*), have enjoyed centuries of advocacy as a language of national identity. Most notably for our purposes, we could not find an example of PD designed specifically for immigrant language programs. Nor were we able to locate any specific European programs for increasing the number of teachers proficient in non-European languages. Thus, the common perception of Europe as advocating multilingual programs in schools (in contrast to the US approach) appears to apply only to the teaching of the languages of power. European educational systems remain resistant to teaching the languages of immigrants. We might anticipate that teachers who promote mother tongue instruction for immigrant students in Europe will face the same political battles of their US counterparts and must be oriented similarly for political action.

At this point, it is important for us to admit that we are not alone in encouraging a political and advocacy role for bilingual teachers. For instance, de Jong, Arias, and Sanchez (2010) found that the restrictive language policies in several key states (e.g., California, Arizona, Massachusetts) have left many bilingual teachers feeling ineffective, unable to provide their students with appropriate, high-quality language instruction. They further suggest that bilingual teachers have become demoralized as a result of English-only laws (cf. Proposition 227) and are now forced to offer a counterfeit education of language instruction, a condition that will naturally cause professional anxiety, burnout, and, in some cases, a retreat from teaching altogether. Katz (2004) pointed out these tensions, as well. Cahnmann and Varghese (2006), Cervantes-Soon and Valenzuela (2011), Dubetz and deJong (2011), and Varghese (2006), suggested that in the current US political climate, bilingual teachers must enlarge their roles as community and school advocates. The volume edited by Brutt-

Griffler and Varghese (2004) contains several works linking bilingual teacher identity to acts of resistance towards debilitating language policies.

Nearly 20 years ago, Alma Flor Ada (1995) roundly admonished the preparation of bilingual teachers and their treatment once in their careers. After listening to the experiences of several bilingual teachers, she argued that bilingual teachers

need to understand the societal forces that have influenced their cultural and linguistic identity so that they can stop passively accepting their circumstances and become not only agents of their own transformation but also leaders in the world around them. (p. 393)

We suggest that bilingual teachers' greatest political asset is their connection to their communities. Language teachers have a special relationship with their students and families (Télliez, 2010) and bilingual teachers must use their role as community leaders to advance quality language instruction. Of course, this task is made all the more difficult because many speakers of minority languages, in any nation, are immigrants, often undocumented, and may lack the basic right to cast a vote.

In addition to collective and collaborative PD and strengthening connections to language minority communities, there is a need to explore and understand how else to help prepare bilingual teachers for intellectual and advocacy roles. Cahnmann and Varghese (2006) suggested that networks of support must be developed, such as those in the Bilinguals United for Education and New Opportunities center at the University of Colorado (Baca, Bransford, Nelson, & Ortiz, 1994), TELL (Teachers for Language Learners) at the University of Georgia (Cahnmann, Rymes, & Souto Manning, 2005), and also in the examples around the globe that we outlined. There is also a necessity to think outside the box, as Cahnmann-Taylor and Souto-Manning (2010, p. 4) showed in their book on using Boalian theater for preparing bilingual teachers to "act up," as well as looking into other professions that might better prepare teachers more explicitly in advocacy roles.

And thus, we conclude our article with what might be a controversial assertion, but one that further demonstrates the political intensity of bilingual education, as well as the need for both political acumen among bilingual teachers as well as stronger political will in state and national policies. Prior to the Unz initiative in California, most school systems awarded bilingual teachers with a stipend beyond their regular pay. In some cases, these premiums amounted to more than \$6,000 per year, which was often greater than the stipend for earning a Master's degree. School districts typically justified these stipends by pointing out that bilingual teachers were in high demand and, although with less frequency, that their work was made more difficult because they had to teach in two languages, not to mention the challenge of working in programs under constant critique. The shortage resulted in a bidding war among school districts in desperate need for bilingual teachers. At the time, many of us argued that the shortage was best solved by developing precollegiate teacher education programs designed to encourage and assist bilingual, Latino/a high school students to attend college, earn teaching certificates, and return as bilingual teachers to the very schools with shortages. Such programs, we suggested at the time, would have been less costly than the premiums and would have actually grown the number of bilingual teachers.

As the Unz initiative gathered strength and was placed on the ballot, the California Teachers Association (CTA), the National Education Association affiliate that has essentially controlled the Democratic Party in both the California Assembly and Senate for the past 40 years, seemed uninterested. Although CTA officially opposed Proposition 227, their actions did not match their rhetoric. To wit, CTA spent a little over \$2 million to defeat 227. By contrast, 5 years later in 2003, it would spend nearly \$4 million dollars to defeat an arcane energy bill that would have made it more difficult for alternative energy projects to obtain state approval. Two years after 227 was passed, CTA spent over \$26 million to defeat a school voucher initiative that had little support in the first place. A key

strategy for unions is the collective bargaining agreement, and the stipends for bilingual teachers represented compensation outside the agreement. Did the union forsake bilingual education and its teachers because it opposed the stipends? We leave it to our readers to decide.

Finally, we mention the anecdotal data reporting that over half of all teachers in the state voted for 227, as additional evidence that bilingual teachers and their program have been marginalized and maligned not only by the traditional enemies of bilingual education but also by their colleagues. Thus, our conclusion is that PD for bilingual teachers means learning how to fight for their programs with better data and shaper polemics. Politics as usual will not do.

By concluding our article with this sad tale story, we do not mean to discourage bilingual teachers from taking action. On the contrary, we believe that advocates of bilingual education have some constructive options:

1. Learn the political landscape of your local school/district. If you are a member of a teachers union, get involved and build alliances (Compton & Weiner, 2008). These institutions will probably help you but only if they understand your goals.
2. Learn to conduct teacher research in your classroom. Gather longitudinal data on your students and their success. Show the positive consequences of bilingual programming, but do not be afraid to share the shortcomings. No one will believe you if you claim that bilingual education works perfectly in every instance with every child.
3. Consider the development of two-way immersion programs in which native English-speaking children are taught a second (usually lower-status) language. These programs can save a form of bilingual education by building alliances with those who have more cultural and economic capital, but be careful of their motives (Valdes, 1997).
4. Stay professional. The premise of this entire volume is that teaching is a profession that requires continuous growth and development of high-level skills. When bilingual teachers

allow too much emotion into their dialogue with antibilingual education opponents, it usually hurts the teachers. Fighting for these programs does not mean yelling at school board trustees or leaders. Redirect anger into analyzing data and writing analytical papers.

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